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ILLUSTRATED BOOKS

THE Museum has just received as gifts from Felix M. Warburg and Mortimer L. Schiff a number of very important woodcut books, among which are such things as beautiful copies of Dürer's treatises on Fortification, Mensuration and Proportion, the Hroswitha and Celtis's *Quatuor libri amorum* and a Life of Saint Jerome, all illustrated with woodcuts by Dürer, and

by Hans Weiditz, which with the Fuch's Herbal, already in the Museum library, is the most important and beautiful German Renaissance botany book, Pfintzing's *Theurdank* illustrated with many woodcuts by Schaufelein, Burgkmair, Beck, Weiditz, and others, the *Biblicae Icones* of Hans Sebald Beham, Altdorfer's *Passion* set in book form, the *Hortulus Anime* containing woodcuts by Springinklee and Schön, Cicero's *Officia* illustrated by Hans



AN ECCLESIASTIC AT HIS WRITING DESK
IN *REVELATIONES SANCTE BIRGITTE*, 1500

the *Revelations of Saint Bridget*, some of the illustrations in which may possibly be by him. There are also two copies of Dürer's *Apocalypse* in book form, one in a seventeenth-century binding, and another in which unfortunately the prints have been slightly cropped but of great interest as containing the only known impression of a woodcutter's monogram, possibly that of the man who engraved the blocks. In addition to this most interesting lot of Dürer items, there are copies of the first part of Brunfels' *Herbal*, with woodcuts

Weiditz, and Goltzius' curious collection of *chiaroscuro* portraits of Roman emperors.

Any attempt to do justice to such a list of books as this is obviously impossible in the restricted space available in the *BULLETIN*, each item being worthy of prolonged study and most careful examination, and although there is a voluminous literature about all of them, as a whole they still afford material for investigation and discovery of the most interesting kind, presenting not only difficult and intricate

questions of attribution but many problems of a more general variety. The one thing which is most important about them

are beautiful and original works of art by the most important artists of their time and country.



CELTIS PRESENTING HIS BOOK TO MAXIMILIAN I
WOODCUT BY ALBRECHT DÜRER

is their artistic interest, entirely aside from the wheres, whens, whos, and hows with which students go to them, for, fascinating as such inquiries are, the cardinal thing that stands out from them for us in America is the fact that their illustrations

Here today the illustrated book is on every table and in every hand, hundreds of men and women of industry and ability devote their time and their talents to illustration, and yet not one book in a thousand of those we produce will ever be saved

more than a few years for its illustrations. The reason is apparent; it is not that there are not good draughtsmen among us, for there are many clever ones, but that the illustrations which appear in our books are not real works of art. Our most prominent artists paint and draw and "sculpt," but they do not "illustrate" except by adverse chance. Our artists who have not arrived "illustrate" as a means of livelihood, always looking forward to the time when they may be financially able to stop

finable something about it which causes original works of art to be regarded seriously where mere reproductions are not and in the nature of things cannot be. Until the present-day artist and his editor can be brought to see that his drawing is not an "original" but merely a step in the process of producing a picture printed on a piece of paper, and that the printed picture is the test of his work, the "original" in the fullest sense of the word, the thing itself, the matter cannot be remedied.



WOODCUT BY HANS WEIDITZ
FROM CICERO'S OFFICIA, 1531

the grind for the "art editor." The "art editor" in turn, and naturally enough, regarding his "illustrations" as merchandise, to be produced as cheaply and quickly as possible, turns to the photoengraver for information about the easiest and cheapest and quickest methods of production. And the photoengraver not only dictates how the drawings shall be made, their pigments, and their size, but is careful to retain as closely as possible all information how the process blocks after them are made. The result is that the draughtsman makes large and intricate drawings, and that done washes his hands of the matter, quite frankly regarding the "illustration" that appears on the printed page as merely a reproduction. And that is all it is, it is not an original work of art with the inde-

And the artist cannot be brought to see this until the art editor permits and encourages him to foregather with the photoengraver and printer and learn something about their techniques, their difficulties, and the qualities that are inherent in their technical tasks, so that the artist may work with understanding of each of the steps that lie between his finished drawing and the final printed picture and may intelligently adapt his designs to them.

Now Dürer and Burgkmair, Weiditz and Beck, knew about these things from very force of circumstances, they made their drawings directly on the plank of wood, and those drawings were destroyed in the very process of being cut, so that the only thing there was to judge their artistry by was the eventual print from the

block upon a piece of paper. Being all there was, it was original and it became a matter of the greatest moment to them to understand precisely how to draw so that the cutter might least distort their lines and the printer best print the blocks. In consequence they adapted their work most

to the little printed picture. But the editor and the photoengraver too must be willing and ready to play their part, to make allowances for each other, and to adapt their methods to the requirements of team play.

It is frequently said that the modern



CRUCIFIXION, NUREMBERG SCHOOL
IN REVELATIONES SANCTE BIRGITTE, 1500

carefully to the limitations and most eagerly availed themselves of the qualities inherent in the crafts of both cutter and printer. It was a matter of life or death to them as artists to do so.

So far as the modern artist is concerned, if he will, he can find out about process and adapt himself to its requirements—it is largely with him a psychological matter, the shifting of emphasis from his drawing

decline in illustration is due to the substitution of process blocks for woodblocks, and to a certain extent it is a true statement, because prior to the introduction of process the designer was obliged to make his drawings with the woodcutter's technique in view—he could not depend upon the photoengraver's skill in reproduction. But though such an attitude may be natural, in view of the universal belief

in the magic of process, it is neither a necessary nor a true one. More than ever before, if the artist desires that his illustrations should be works of art, must he know about process and work with its exigencies constantly in view—because the photoengraver is quite incapable of jacking up his drawing, of *making* it, in short, as was so often the case in the old days. Today the most that the photoengraver can do is not to spoil a drawing—he can't help it or make it something other and better than when it left the artist's hand.

Moreover, it is frequently said that process is something inherently inartistic—but such a point of view if logically carried out would debar from the "artistic" the woodcuts by Dürer and Holbein, every engraving and mezzotint not made from an original design by the engraver himself, and many of the best-known etchings. The mere matter of how many hands are concerned in the making of a print from the inception of the design to the final impression upon the pages of a printed book has nothing to do with artistry—otherwise what would become of buildings and bronzes, music and the drama? The fact that the camera is interjected into the sequence of events in the technical progression is equally immaterial—it is nothing more than a mechanical transfer of the design from paper to metal plate, a thing which it does far more accurately than even the most trained hand. In short, logically and practically there is no reason underlying the feeling that "process" is

inartistic other than the simple fact that "process" is almost always used inartistically, and to damn a technique as such solely because it is misused is to forget what technique really is, to mix it up with something else—a confusion of thought which would dismiss charcoal from among the proper tools of an artist because it is most frequently used by naughty boys upon blank walls.

The short and simple fact is that a process block is an etching, and, if used understandingly and with care, capable of exactly as "artistic" results as any of the older techniques, in fact, of results which except by the expert cannot be distinguished from the results of those older techniques. And this being so, the responsibility for the difference in quality between the illustrations in the books of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries and those that appear in our current books can easily be brought home.

If the very great artistic merit of the old woodcut book as exemplified in these venerable volumes just added to the Museum collection can even a little be appreciated by those who today make books, their presence in that collection will have done far more than is necessary for justification. They are eloquent and weighty evidences of the great and forgotten fact that the large majority of beautiful prints were made as book illustrations, and that "prints," with all that the word implies, are the only proper kind of book illustration.

W. M. I., JR.



WOODCUT BY HANS WEIDITZ
FROM THE BRUNFELS HERBAL OF 1530